

Frail Happiness: An Essay on Rousseau


By Tzvetan Todorov

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"We are all confronted, at one time or another, with choices as to what sort of life we will lead." So Tzvetan Todorov begins *Frail Happiness*, an important interpretation of Rousseau, one suffused with Todorov's own moral seriousness and intellectual depth. While ranging widely through Rousseau's corpus with skill and scholarly authority Todorov returns, again and again, to the fragile yet persistent hope for human happiness.

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Frail Happiness: An Essay on Rousseau By Tzvetan Todorov Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #4991300 in Books
- Published on: 2001-04-06
- Original language: French
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .50" w x 5.50" l, .58 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 104 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“Todorov accomplishes remarkably much in this brief book, and he does so with a clarity and grace that reflect his humanism and his intention to confront life honestly, characteristics he particularly admires in Rousseau.”

—Laurence D. Cooper, *Review of Politics*

“This translation . . . is doubly welcome. . . . [It] offers readers both an insightful interpretation of Rousseau, one that presents him explicitly as a moral theorist, and an introduction to Todorov’s own contributions to what he calls a ‘critical humanism’.”

—Zev M. Trachtenberg, *Ethics*

“In *Frail Happiness*, Todorov argues for the coherence of Rousseau, against those who prefer to underscore his contradictions. In its very simplicity it is an elegant presentation, one that will doubtless attract many readers.”

—Philip Stewart, Duke University

“*Frail Happiness* remains possibly the most successful of Tzvetan Todorov’s writings on the history of ideas. . . . It is sustained by great intuition and emotional sympathy; crafted with admirable modesty and sparing means, it succeeds in conveying the essence of Rousseau’s thinking, offering an excellent, reader-friendly introduction to anyone wishing to approach his works.”

—Biancamaria Fontana, *Times Literary Supplement*

“All the same, *Frail Happiness* remains possibly the most successful of Tzvetan Todorov’s writings on the history of ideas: if the text is little more than a collage of quotations and well-chosen images, it is sustained by great intuition and emotional sympathy; crafted with admirable modesty and sparing means, it succeeds in conveying the essence of Rousseau’s thinking, offering an excellent, reader-friendly introduction to anyone wishing to approach his works.”

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About the Author

Tzvetan Todorov is a director of research at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris. A linguist, literary theorist, and world-renowned essayist, he is the author of numerous books, several of which have been translated into English, including: *Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria* (Penn State, 1999).

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